

Draft – for discussion only

Date

TO: [addressee to come]

FROM: [name to come]

SUBJECT: Opposition to SB 608 (Liu) Right to Rest Act

I am writing on behalf of property owners/business owners in _____. Our nonprofit organization manages a business improvement district that [describe general area or basic services to set context]. We are asking you to vote no on SB 608 (Liu), the “Right to Rest Act.”

The Right to Rest Act is a re-branded version of a former bill that was defeated in 2013, the “Homeless Bill of Rights.” Our concerns about this legislation remain the same as two years ago: individuals who suffer from homelessness have a right to housing and shelter. Preserving their “right” to live and eat on the streets and sidewalks of our cities sets us back to a mindset prevalent over a decade ago -- that homelessness in America must be “managed.” We have learned, and believe, that homelessness can be ended.

There are [choose only those which apply to your situation] reasons why we oppose this bill:

1. The public right-of-way is to be enjoyed by all, without being subject to intimidation or lack of sanitary conditions. This legislation shifts the balance toward conditions that may impede business and render our downtown districts intimidating and uncomfortable for those who live, work, visit and go to school.
2. The limitations on law enforcement officials, BID agents and public or private security personnel to assist or aid individuals who are homeless will create a chilling effect on those who are often the first responders and in a position to assist. The legislation equates interactions with such personnel as “harassment.”
3. This bill would result in CA cities becoming more of a magnet for individuals to come and continue a homeless lifestyle. Often individuals who choose to live on the

streets are suffering from substance abuse and/or mental illness, and granting them the “right” to live on our streets suggests society owes them no right to treatment or safe refuge in a home or shelter.

4. Coupled with the unintended consequences of AB 109, and Prop 47, passage of this bill will continue the trend noticed in our downtown of an increasingly violent and intimidating subset of our homeless population. Though not all people who suffer from homelessness are violent, it is evident that the few who are, impact the safety and well-being of an entire community.

5. The bill places no limit on how many people may rest on a sidewalk, for example, for a given time. In our community, often large groups of young people will gather with their pets and pester passersby for money. This is intimidating to pedestrians, and the bill would make it difficult, if not impossible, to address these behaviors.

We urge a “no” vote on this bill and ask our Legislature to support efforts that result in positive outcomes with respect to moving people off the streets and into housing. Legislative priorities should be oriented toward:

- Increasing the stock of affordable housing in this state
- Providing funding for vocational training and re-entry support for those leaving the criminal justice system and returning to their communities
- Overhauling the state’s mental health laws to facilitate the involuntary treatment of individuals who suffer from chronic and debilitating mental illness and deserve medical treatment before they harm themselves or others
- Providing resources to local communities for detox beds and quick access to substance abuse rehab to provide safe alternatives to those addicted to substances living on our streets
- Supporting the creation of more permanent supportive housing for those experiencing chronic homeless and debilitating conditions.

As business improvement districts who often have a first-name basis with many of the people who are homeless in our communities, these are the types of initiatives we are advocating for. We ask the legislature to join us in this endeavor, not tie our hands to help those who are most vulnerable in our society.

Sincerely